

Md. officials hope to bring the agency, jobs to Prince George's

By John Fritze

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The agency charged with overseeing federal buildings said Monday it will begin reviewing sites for a new FBI headquarters, formally launching a competition that has quietly pitted Maryland against its neighbors for more than a year.

State and local officials have been working behind the scenes for months to lure the FBI to Prince George's County if the agency leaves its 38-year-old headquarters, the J. Edgar Hoover Building, in downtown Washington.

More than 11,000 people would work at the new facility. Its economic impact would rival that of the Social Security Administration, which has its headquarters in Woodlawn.

In a formal solicitation, the General Services Administration — the landlord of the federal government — said it is seeking a site that can accommodate 2.1 million square feet of office space in Virginia, Maryland or Washington.

To help offset costs, the GSA has proposed granting development rights to the Hoover building

site — prime real estate in Washington — as part of its payment for a new headquarters.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's current home has been plagued with problems, including a crumbling facade that has threatened pedestrians with falling debris. A 2009 study found the building needs \$80.5 million in upgrades.

FBI officials also note the agency's workforce is scattered over 22 annex buildings. A Government Accountability Office audit last year found that the lack of consolidation created security challenges for an agency charged with handling sensitive information.

The six-page solicitation does not lock the government into building a new headquarters. It is intended only to gauge interest from developers and local governments. But in Maryland, state and local economic development officials already have been noting that Prince George's County has sites available.

"We're doing everything we can to make sure that Maryland has a competitive offering or offerings," said Jayson Knott, director of the Office of Business Development at the state's Department of Business and Economic Development.

A joint statement from four Democratic members of Maryland's congressional delegation — including Reps. Steny Hoyer and Donna F. Edwards — argued that it is "clear Prince George's County is the right choice for the new headquarters."

"We will be working closely together to advocate for bringing this project, and the new economic opportunities that will accompany it, to Prince George's County," the statement read.

But Virginia officials also have pushed hard for the project. Democratic Rep. Jim Moran, a former mayor of Alexandria who now represents Northern Virginia, noted the agency already has a campus in Quantico.

State and local economic development officials in Maryland started lining up potential properties long before the GSA made its request public. Additionally, Sen. Ben Cardin moved a resolution through the Senate last year that set broad parameters for the location. The House of Representative has yet to act on that resolution.

Local leaders have been sharpening their pitch. Aides to Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker III have said that 25 percent of the region's federal employees live in the county, but it is home to only 4 percent of the government's office space.

In addition to Social Security, Maryland is home to the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the National Security Agency and several other civilian and military agencies. Prince George's County lost a bid to lure about 3,000 Department of Health and Human Services workers away from neighboring Montgomery County last year.